



Sommelier's Choice

Top Releases of 2011

For the third consecutive year, we invited *Sommelier Journal's* editors and regular writers, along with other leading wine professionals, to name their most memorable bottlings of the previous 12 months. Each contributor was allowed to choose any wine with no restrictions by region, variety, or price, as long as the selection had been released within the past year and was available to buyers in the United States. We asked them not to pick wines that they represented commercially, so as to avoid conflicts of interest.

In one case, two respondents picked the same wine, and the second was asked to submit another choice. As in our 2009 and 2010 editions, the selectors covered a vast range of wines from regions and varieties both familiar and obscure, from amazing values to collector's items. The producers are arranged alphabetically within each category and region, and the entire list appears in a box at the end of the article.

David Vogels, CWP
Editor



Importer: Winebow, www.winebow.com.

Catherine Fallis, MS
Planet Grape, LLC
San Francisco

**Massolino Barolo Riserva Vigna Ronda,
Piedmont, Italy 2005 \$97**

If they ever finalized a grand cru system for the vineyards of Barolo, Vigna Ronda would certainly be on the list. Located in the heart of Serralunga d'Alba, this south-facing, 30-acre site has been justifiably famous for more than 120 years. At about 1,000 feet in altitude, it contains a higher percentage of chalk than most of the surrounding area, and it traditionally produces wines that demand aging. Realizing that, winemaker Franco Massolino holds the wine for six years before release. "Classic" seems to pop up in just about every sentence of my notes. From the first scents of plum, dried leaves, herbs, and hay to the superb balance and extraordinarily long finish, this wine is as close to a perfect expression of the Nebbiolo grape as it gets. Importer: DSWE, www.domaineselect.com.

Bob Bath, MS
Wine and Beverage Instructor
Culinary Institute of America at Greystone
St. Helena, Calif.

**Renato Ratti Barolo Marcenasco,
Piedmont, Italy 2007 \$55**

Fine young Barolo captures its heritage in an inimitable way, and Ratti's superb 2007 Marcenasco is a silky-textured, sensual delight. Warm notes of cherry and raspberry are interwoven with subtleties of sandalwood, dried roses, tea, leather, anise, and truffle. After a velvety entry, the wine grips your palate with its ample tannin and acid structure, promising a long and rewarding life. Whether enjoyed now or 20 years hence, this Barolo will offer plenty of tasting pleasure. Importer: Dreyfus, Ashby & Co., www.dreyfusashby.com.

Wayne Belding, MS
Author, *Diving Into Wine*
Boulder, Colo.

**Speri Amarone della Valpolicella Classico
Vigneto Monte Sant'Urbano,
Veneto, Italy 2007 \$87**

Over the past decade, the best producers in Amarone have been refining their wines from monsters into still-powerful yet elegant offerings. Speri's single-vineyard Monte Sant'Urbano, from grapes grown at 1,000 feet in the commune of Fumane, is a textbook ex-

ample. Aged in large and midsize oak barrels, it sports gorgeous aromas of Queen Anne cherry, strawberry jam, and red poppies. The deeply concentrated palate combines perfectly tuned acidity with velvety tannins and a lengthy finish. This new release is just as impressive as the one from 2006, a more celebrated vintage. A truly delicious Amarone, it is appealing now, but will be at its best in 15-20 years. Importer: Empson USA Inc., www.empsonusa.com.

Tom Hyland
Publisher, *Guide to Italian Wines*
Chicago

**La Rioja Alta Viña Ardanza Reserva Especial,
Rioja, Spain 2001 \$30**

Mulberry, coconut, and tobacco-leaf aromas mingle with smooth yet well-structured tannins and vibrant acidity to coax this multilayered wine into a lengthy finish. Following the 1973 and 1964, it's only the third vintage bottled under this label, adding caché and intrigue to any wine list. And if large-format wines happen to be your restaurant's calling, you're in luck: the bodega bottled magnums for the first time in 2001. Importer: Michael Skurnik Wines, www.skurnikwines.com.

Christy A. Canterbury, MW
Consultant, *Vitis.com*
Educator, Astor Center
New York City

**Quinta do Crasto Reserva Old Vines,
Douro, Portugal 2009 \$45**

Why put this on your wine list? It contains lots of declassified juice from the legendary Vinha da Ponte and Maria Teresa old-field-blend vineyards (the average age of the vines is 75), making it an exceptional value. In fact, the 2009 is my favorite version of Crasto's Reserva since the awe-inspiring 2004. Deeply extracted and concentrated, with a multifaceted middle and extraordinary balance, it offers softly textured plum and red fruits framed by ripe tannins; lip-smacking acidity; and a delicious, lingering finish. Importer: Broadbent Selections, www.broadbent.com.

Roy Hersh
www.fortheloveofport.com
Seattle

**Quinta do Crasto Vinha Maria Teresa,
Douro, Portugal 2009 \$137**

This top-notch table wine is blended from as many as 36 local varieties co-planted on the steep, schistous terraces of the Douro nearly

